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Lord Vyet

AND OTHER POEMS

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L O R D V Y E T
AND
O T H E R P O E M S

BY
ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON
Of Eton College

τελευταῖον δὲ πάντων ξυνίσταται
ἢ ἀρμονία, καὶ πρῶτον ἀπόλλυται

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON AND NEW YORK
1897

TO

The Hon. Maurice Baring

P 12

—

DEDICATION

*Friend, of my infinite dreams
Little enough endures ;
Little howe'er it seems,
It is yours, all yours.*

*Fame hath a fleeting breath,
Hopes may be frail or fond ;
But Love shall be Love till death,
And perhaps beyond.*

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PRÆLUDÆ

*Hushed is each busy shout :
The reverent people wait,
To see the sacred pomp stream out
Beside the temple-gate.*

*The bull with garlands hung,
Stern priests in vesture grim :
With rolling voices swiftly sung
Peals out the jocund hymn.*

*In front, behind, beside,
Beneath the chiming towers,
Pass boys that fling the censer wide,
And striplings scattering flowers.*

PRELUDE

*Vi&tim or minister
I dare not claim to be,
But in the concourse and the stir,
There shall be room for me.*

*The victim feels the stroke:
The priests are bowed in prayer :—
I feed the porch with fragrant smoke,
Strew roses on the stair.*

LORD VYET

WHAT, must my lord be gone ?

Command his horse, and call

The servants, one and all.

“ Nay, nay, I go alone.”

My Lord, I shall unfold

Thy cloak of sables rare

To shield thee from the air :

“ Nay, nay, I must be cold.”

At least thy leech I'll tell

Some drowsy draught to make,

Less thou should toss awake.

“ Nay, nay, I shall sleep well.”

LORD VYET

My lady keeps her bower :—
I hear the lute delight
The dark and frozen night,
High up within the tower.

Wilt thou that she descend ?
Thy son is in the hall,
Tossing his golden ball,
Shall he my lord attend ?

“ Nay, sirs, unbar the door,
The broken lute shall fall ;
My son will leave his ball
To tarnish on the floor.”

Yon bell to triumph rings !
To greet thee, monarchs wait
Beside their palace gate.
“ Yes, I shall sleep with kings,”

LORD VYET

My lord will soon alight
With some rich prince, his friend,
Who shall his ease attend.
“ I shall lodge low to-night.”

My lord hath lodging nigh ?
“ Yes, yes, I go not far,—
And yet the furthest star
Is not so far as I.”

THE SIREN

REST thee in a field of fountains:

Wanderer, wilt thou further go?

Range the large and lonely mountains?

“Ah, no, no!”

Here the welling wave shall strengthen

Thee, to brave the further stress;

Rest thee, till the shadows lengthen:—

“Ah, yes, yes!”

See, the angry sun grows stronger,

Faintly smiles the weary day;

Wanderer, rest a little longer;

Ah, stay, stay!

THE SIREN

See, the place of storms, the hated
Ridge, with high and hungry crest:
Thou art even now belated:
 So rest, rest!

“ Nay, alas! I fear to lose me
In the hot land’s drowsy breath:
But a dreadful voice pursues me
 Saying ‘ Death, Death,’

“ Through the wide and wintry heaven,
To the aching vales of frost,
Where the wind shall wail at even,
 Crying ‘ Lost, Lost.’ ”

A TRIO

I, and the Bird,
And the Wind together,
Sang a supplication
In the winter weather.

The Bird sang for sunshine,
And trees of winter fruit,
And love in the spring-time,
When the thickets shoot.

And I sang for patience
When the teardrops start:
Clean hands and clear eyes,
And a faithful heart.

A TRIO

And the Wind thereunder,
As we faintly cried,
Breathed a bass of wonder,
Blowing deep and wide.

THE RAILWAY

UPON the iron highway, wreathed in smoke,
Or East or West the clanking engine reels,
The weary dust spins onward at the stroke
Of half-a-hundred wheels.

It comes, the breathless driver staring straight
Through misty eye-holes, with the sudden
gleam
Of burnished dome, and cranks of ponderous
weight,
And clouds of hissing steam.

Old countrymen, that trudge from new-ploughed
lands,

THE RAILWAY

And on high bridges stay their weary feet,
See faces flashed beneath them, waving hands
That may not stay to greet.

Or slow, with hollow blast and wealthy din,
By wide-armed signals creeps the laden train,
High vans with shuddering jolt, and clinking pin,
And hiss of clattering chain.

Wide-eyed, affrighted cattle, meek and still :
And murky coal for city folk to burn,
And dusty blocks hewed from some Western hill,
And wreathed in twisted fern.

But best of all, when, in the sullen night,
Along the dim embankment, hung in air,
Shoots the red streamer, linked with cheerful light ;
The wide-flung furnace-glare

THE RAILWAY

Lights the dim hedges and the rolling steam:—

Then passes, and in narrowing distance dies,
Tracked by the watchful lanterns' lessening
gleam—

Two red resentful eyes.

And some are borne to dim and alien shores,

And some return to merriment and home:—
These, while the train through slumbering
homestead roars

Thrill with delight:—and some

Fly from the horror that their hands have
wrought,

And shudder, as the shivering engine reels;
They fly, but falter: one red-throated thought
Pants ever at their heels.

THE MOWER

WHET thy scythe, mower,
Though thy hand swing slow,
The sun falls lower,
And the shadows grow.

How the white blade flashes
In the steady sun !
All the dinted slashes
Tell the death of one.

Field-flower and clover,
Sword-grass seeded high,
Summer dreams are over,
Side by side they lie.

THE MOWER

Winds above them lying
Stir with fragrant feet ;
Who would shrink from dying
If death smelt so sweet ?

From the sturdy shoulder
Let the scythe be swung ;
Soon the blade shall moulder,
In the granary hung.

Iron steeds of battle
Snort o'er humming farms :
Hear them clink and rattle,
Lifting solemn arms !

Whet thy scythe bolder,
Evening comes apace :
One with scythe on shoulder
Runs a rival race.

THE MOWER

Through the whispering grasses
Let the bright blade ring ;
Ere the good time passes,
Mower, stride and swing.

LIVE-BAIT

THE weir was fragrant, with the scent
 Of falling streams and trailing weeds ;
The careful angler leaned intent,
 And cast his net beyond the reeds :
Three silvery dace imprisoned there
 Were dragged all gasping to the air.

One from the dripping net he took,
 And squeezed his tender body hard,
And pierced him with his cruel hook
 That all his limber mouth was marred :
Then cast him where the stream gushed out
 To be a bait for Master Trout.

LIVE-BAIT

So all that golden afternoon
He strove and swam—now dangled high,
Now plunged afresh: and oh, so soon
As he hath gained his liberty,
Must swing and flicker, sorely spent
Within the dazzling firmament.

At evensong he sobbed and died.
I know not ! but did God forget
That day upon the water side ?
Or cast him sternly in the net ?
Oh broken dreams, oh cruel lot !
Would I could think that God forgot !

THE SHEPHERD

THE shepherd is an ancient man,
His back is bent, his foot is slow;
Although the heavens he doth not scan,
He scents what winds shall blow.

His face is like the pippin, grown
Red ripe, in frosty suns that shone;
'Tis hard and wrinkled, as a stone
The rains have rained upon.

When tempests sweep the dripping plain,
He stands unmoved beneath the hedge,
And sees the columns of the rain,
The storm-cloud's shattered edge.

THE SHEPHERD

When frosts among the misty farms
 Make crisp the surface of the loam,
He shivering claps his creaking arms,
 But would not sit at home.

Short speech he hath for man and beast ;
 Some fifty words are all his store.
Why should his language be increased ?
 He hath no need for more.

There is no change he doth desire,
 Of far-off lands he hath not heard ;
Beside his wife, before the fire,
 He sits, and speaks no word.

He holds no converse with his kind,
 On birds and beasts his mind is bent ;
He knows the thoughts that stir their mind,
 Love, hunger, hate, content.

THE SHEPHERD

Of kings and wars he doth not hear.

He tells the seasons that have been
By stricken oaks and hunted deer,

And strange fowl he has seen.

In Church, some muttering he doth make,

Well-pleased when hymns harmonious rise ;
He doth not strive to overtake

The hurrying litanies.

He hears the music of the wind,

His prayer is brief, and scant his creed ;
The shadow, and what lurks behind,

He doth not greatly heed.

•

ONE BY ONE

ONE by one, as evening closes,
Droop the flowers that drank the sun ;
See, they sleep, my weary roses,
One by one :

Never did I bend above you,
O my flowers, while all was bright ;
There is time, I said, to love you
Ere the night.

You were neither watched nor tended,
Fevered thoughts were mine instead,
Now the weary day is ended ;—
You are dead.

ONE BY ONE

Now I come in dumb disorder,
Seek and search, in wild regret,
If one rose in bed or border
Wakens yet.

Nay, they slumber till the morrow!
Hasten homewards : bar the gate.
Through the cold dark hours of sorrow
I will wait.

WHEN PUNCTUAL DAWN

WHEN punctual dawn came o'er the hill,
In orange veiled and tender blue,
Wan in the dark field gleamed the rill,
The dusky hedge was gemmed with dew.

And patient sheep from folded feet
Rose one by one, alert for food,
And one by one, so small and sweet,
The flattened grass-stems stirred and stood.

And I too rose, and stepping down
Drank deep the invigorating air,
And scanned the little sleeping town,
And thanked my God that I was there.

“THE EARTH HATH DRUNK DEEP”

THE earth hath drunk deep
Of the rains of God :
When men were asleep.
On the thirsty sod,
On the dusty town,
Most silent and steep
Did the rain leap down.

And the delicate stems
Of the grass are clean,
And the elders are green,
And the rose is brimmed with gems.

“THE EARTH HATH DRUNK DEEP”

My heart hath drunk deep
Of the wine of God :
When men were asleep
Were the dark grapes trode,
And the acrid must—
Oh ! the draught was deep—
To my lips was thrust :—

Shadows and fears
Were the bitter part
Of the craven heart,
And the cup was brimmed with tears.

IN ETON CHURCHYARD

In and out I tread the slender
Paths that wind by grave and grave;
In the summer breeze the tender
Grasses wave.

Jackdaws cheerily hallooing
From the turret's dizzy edge:
Glossy doves serenely cooing
From their ledge.

Through the stillness, faint and dreamy,
Comes the murmur of the town,
Where the thorn tree shakes her creamy
Petals down.

IN ETON CHURCHYARD

Brothers, sisters, silent lying,
Ere you breathed the last long breath,
Were you too afraid of dying,
Not of death ?

Do you walk unseen beside us ?
Prompt, applaud our dreams of good ?
Would you comfort, warn us, guide us,
If you could ?

Children, tired of idle jesting,
Locked in dear embraces weep :
Sink reluctant, sink protesting
Into sleep.

Tho' the host that none can number
Greet upon the joyful shore,
I should be content to slumber
Evermore.

THE ARTIST IN CHURCH

LORD CHRIST, hast Thou no word for me,
Thou high and humble soul ?

Thine ailing creatures turn to Thee
From their abiding misery,
And wonder, and are whole.

Strong words Thou hast for knave and king,
For publican and priest,
For flowers that bloom, and birds that sing,
For every small or suffering thing,
Sad man and patient beast :

For us with our awakened eyes,
With skilled and careful hands,

THE ARTIST IN CHURCH

Who harvest from the sunset skies
A sense of gracious mysteries,
Thou hast no dear commands ?

Hath Thomas faith, hath Peter zeal,
Hath Paul his words of fire ?
Not less imperiously I feel,
Not less insistently I kneel
Before my pure desire.

Ay, I can preach Thee, I can trace,
With firm and strenuous line,
The awful splendours of the Face,
The shrouded effluence of the grace
Too urgently Divine.

Lo in our eyes the tear-drops start,
We swim in stormy seas :
Hast Thou within Thine ample heart,

THE ARTIST IN CHURCH

No shelter for the sons of art,

No room for such as these ?

Or wert Thou silent of design,

Because Thy thought was cold ?

Doth love of word, of hue, of line,

Sequester from Thy power divine,

Dissociate from Thy fold ?

O words of Power, O gracious deeds !

When Thou didst dwell with men,

Thou didst divine their deepest needs :

I marvel, and my spirit bleeds

That Thou wast silent then.

MY OLD FRIEND

IT seems the world was always bright
With some divine unclouded weather,
When we, with hearts and footsteps light,
By lawn and river walked together :

There was no talk of me and you,
Of theories with facts to bound them,
We were content to be and do,
And take our fortunes as we found them.

We spoke no wistful words of love,
No hint of sympathy and dearness,
Only around, beneath, above,
There ran a swift and subtle nearness.

MY OLD FRIEND

Each inmost thought was known to each
By some impetuous divination :
We found no need of flattering speech,
Content with silent admiration.

I think I never touched your hand,
I took no heed of face or feature,
Only, I thought, on sea or land
Was never such a gracious creature.

It seems I was not hard to please,
Where'er you led I needs must follow ;
For strength you were my Hercules,
For wit and lustre my Apollo.

The years flew onward : stroke by stroke
They clashed from the impartial steeple,
And we appear to other folk
A pair of ordinary people.

MY OLD FRIEND

One word, old friend : though fortune flies,
If hope should fail—till death shall sever—
In one dim pair of faithful eyes
You seem as bright, as brave as ever.

THE OWL

WHEN the winds overhead were sweeping,
And the whole loud woodland was astir,
You were perched, like a weary hermit, sleeping
In a dark tangled fork of the fir.

But at last when the tired wind was winging
To the edge of the smouldering light,
Your laughter, wild and horrible, came ringing
And sent a sudden chill through the night.

You laughed, demoniacally dreaming
Of the rush of the startled mouse,
When you with your grey wing gleaming
Sweep low o'er his heathery house.

THE OWL

And quiet woodland things without number,
Who were couched in bracken and in brake,
Shivered chill, on the edge of slumber,
At the thought of a wicked thing awake.

Thrice you turned your hornèd head in the
shadow,
And blinked with impenetrable eyes,
Then out over copse and misty meadow
You swept under shrouded skies.

The bell beat one in the village,
With the firelight red in the room,
As you came and went, to slay and to pillage,
With your soft wing flapping in the gloom.

THE RINGDOVE

GREY dove, that croonest in the solemn fir,
 Lost in unutterable, deep content,
Soon will the drowsy forest be astir,
 Soon will the loud wind thunder imminent.
But while the shadows lengthen, while the light
 Slants from the West across the red-stemmed
 grove,
Croon thy soft lay of intimate delight,
 Of rapturous solitude, and gracious love.

Thou from the branching fastness canst discern
 The woodways winding green, the island knolls
Crowned with tall oaks, and rimmed with rusty
 fern,

THE RINGDOVE

The beeches, with their plain and rounded
boles,

Widespreading, over smooth and crackling floors ;
The chestnuts splashed with golden bravery,
The pine, a slender pyramid, that soars
With velvet greenness to the freer sky.

Croon as thou wilt : no enemy is near :

Close for awhile thy proud and wary eyes,
Speak to my heart, while yet I linger near,
Thy patient peace, thy languorous mysteries.
Left to herself, how musical of mood

The world's old heart, beside her chosen
shore !

The din, the shattering tumult, and the rude
Thunder of battle should be heard no more.

No more the wild uproarious thirst of life,
The din of words whose purpose is the same :

THE RINGDOVE

The weary enmities, the feverous strife,
Here in this peace are nothing but a name.
Peace, strenuous peace, is thine and mine to-day,
Sedatest energy, divine desire,
This be my part in thy unconscious lay,—
Strongly to hope and softly to aspire.

THE CAT

ON some grave business, soft and slow
Along the garden-paths you go,
With bold and burning eyes :
Or stand, with twitching tail, to mark
What starts and rustles in the dark,
Among the peonies.

The dusty cockchafer that springs
Upon the dusk with whirring wings,
The beetle glossy-horned,
The rabbit pattering through the fern,
May frisk unheeded, by your stern
Preoccupation scorned.

You go, and when the morning dawns
O'er blowing trees and dewy lawns,

THE CAT

Dim-veiled with gossamer,
When cheery birds are on the wing,
You creep, a wild and wicked thing,
With stained and starting fur.

You all day long, beside the fire,
Retrace in dreams your dark desire,
And mournfully complain,
In grave displeasure, if I raise
Your languid form to pet or praise ;—
And so to sleep again.

The gentler hound, that near me lies,
Looks up with true and tender eyes,
And waits my generous mirth ;
You do not woo me, but demand
A gift from my unwilling hand,
A tribute to your worth.

THE CAT

You loved me when the fire was warm,
But now I stretch a fondling arm,
 You eye me and depart.
Cold eyes, sleek skin, and velvet paws,
You win my indolent applause,
 You do not win my heart.

THE HAWK

THE hawk slipt out of the pine, and rose in the sunlit air:

Steady and still he poised; his shadow slept on the grass:

And the bird's song sickened and sank: she cowered with furtive stare

Dumb, till the quivering dimness should flicker and shift and pass.

Suddenly down he dropped: she heard the hiss of his wing,

Fled with a scream of terror: oh, would she had dared to rest!

For the hawk at eve was full, and there was no bird to sing,

And over the heather drifted the down from a bleeding breast.

THE BARBEL

BEARDED Barbel, swimming deep
In the cool translucent gloom,
Poised in contemplative sleep,
In your liquid moving room :

Where the watery gleams transfuse
Coated rush and sleek strong reed,
Up the swaying avenues,
Rimmed with plumed and velvet weed :

Bearded Barbel, you survey
Hour by hour the pebbly floor :
Have you ne'er a wish to stray
Wider from the willowy shore ?

THE BARBEL

Have you ne'er a wilful wonder
Whence the dancing bubbles gleam,
Whence the broad weir's drowsy thunder
Mutters down the murmuring stream ?

Bearded Barbel, be content !
Your dim world is small and sweet ;
Let your safer merriment
Laugh to scorn our restless feet.

If your curious wilful greed
Tempt you, ah the illusive gleam !
You will suffer, you will bleed,
Writhing in the troubled stream.

Sweeps a wild bewildering glare :
Gleams your silver mail beneath :
Then the thin and acid air
Chokes your faint and sobbing breath.

THE WISHING WELL

Yes, here's the place : the meadow thick with
rushes,

The gravelly hill, the elms beside the pool,
Here through the dancing sand it jets and gushes,
Divinely clear and cool.

Now must I kneel and set my palms together,—
So runs the rite,—and then, devoutly bowed,
Face down the wind, so it be windy weather,
Then speak my wish aloud.

No vague desires, virtue and health combining,
Not love—but one inevitable name,
Not wealth, but cash—describing and defining
The very coin I claim.

THE WISHING WELL

Then O bright hope, with no success to dim it,
Vast vague desires, of you I dare not think !
Dear boundless dreams I must curtail and limit !
Nay, nay ! I will not drink.

JACK IN THE BOX

THE bolt is slipped, the wiry rings
Release their struggling mystery:
The merry monster, out he springs,
With whiskered cheek and cheery eye!
He leaps and claps his cymballed hands,
Then still in frozen silence stands.

Come, cram the ruddy rascal down,
Thrust pointed chin on springy breast:
No matter, let him fret and frown,
Within his cedar prison prest:
Through hours of anguish let him gain
New strength to spring and clap again.

When Epimetheus half undid
Pandora's box in surly greed,

JACK IN THE BOX

Slipping from out the lifted lid,
Came darling dream, and pretty deed,
And fifty sweet imaginings
With beaded eyes and filmy wings.

“ For shame, for shame,” Prometheus cried,

“ Dear silly brother, they are sped :—
Nay throw the vacant casket wide,
It prisons one ethereal head :
Still nestling in the fragrant dusk
Lies hope, a frail and faded husk.”

Spring up, and clap thy nimble hands,

O irrepressible delight !
At thy light-hearted shrill demands
Our burdened hearts grow strong and bright :
Though faith wax faint and love take wing,
Unreasoning hope shall leap and sing.

THE PHŒNIX

By feathers green, across Casbeen,
The pilgrims track the Phœnix flown,
By gems he strewed in waste and wood,
And jewelled plumes at random thrown.

Till wandering far, by moon and star,
They stand beside the fruitful pyre,
Whence breaking bright with sanguine light,
The impulsive bird forgets his sire.

Those ashes shine like ruby wine,
Like bag of Tyrian murex spilt,
The claw, the jowl of the flying fowl
Are with the glorious anguish gilt.

THE PHŒNIX

So rare the light, so rich the sight,
Those pilgrim men, on profit bent,
Drop hands and eyes and merchandise,
And are with gazing most content.

EVENSONG

THRUSH, sing clear, for the spring is here :

Sing, for the summer is near, is near,

All day long thou hast plied thy song,

Hardly hid from the hurrying throng:

Now the shade of the trees is laid

Down the meadow and up the glade :

Now when the air grows cool and rare

Birds of the cloister fall to prayer :

Here is the bed of the patient dead,

Shoulder by shoulder, head by head.

Sweet bells swing in the tower, and ring

Men to worship before their King.

EVENSONG

See they come as the grave bells hum,
Restless voices awhile are dumb :

More and more on the sacred floor
Feet that linger about the door :

Sweet sounds swim through the vaulting dim,
Psalm and canticle, vesper hymn.

That is the way that mortals pray :
Which is the sweeter ? brown bird, say !

Which were best for me ? both are blest ;
Sing thy sweetest and leave the rest.

SELF

THIS is my chiefest torment, that behind
This brave and subtle spirit, this swift brain,
There sits and shivers, in a cell of pain,
A central atom, melancholy, blind,

Which is myself: tho' when spring suns are kind,
And rich leaves riot in the genial rain,
I cheat him dreaming, slip my rigorous chain,
Free as a skiff before the dancing wind.

Then he awakes, and vexed that I am glad,
In dreary malice strains some nimble chord,
Pricks his thin claw within some tingling
nerve:
And all at once I falter, start, and swerve
From my true course, and fall, unmanned and sad,
Into gross darkness, tangible, abhorred.

SELF

Yet I can send my thought from sun to sun,
Behind the stars, beyond the eternal night;
Pierce through the whirling spheres of fervent
light,

Or nearer roam: hither and thither run;

Strain to a sharp and icy summit, thread
The poisonous depth of some hot forest maze,
Or haunt the dark sea-bottom's glimmering
ways,

Where sunken wrecks hang silent overhead.

Now, in a sun-dried city of the south,
Linger through dusty vineyards, branching
palms;—

The shrill cicadas chirping in the drouth;—
Or swim by coral islets, floating free
And eager, parting with imagined arms
The crystal rollers of a sapphire sea.

SELF

Or I constrain the poets to my call ;—

With Homer, staff in hand, and lyre on back,

Stumbling and sightless on the upland track,

Or praised and honoured in the echoing hall,

Hear from his lips the rolling thunders fall ;

Or sit with Virgil in the orchard-edge,

Hearing the bees hum in the privet hedge,

And deep-mouthed cattle lowing from the stall.

Or I can follow Una's peerless knight

Riding alone in mountain solitudes,

Where Awbey leaps from Bally-howra hill ;

Or trace the clear impetuous Rotha rill,

With Wordsworth, mouthing music in the
woods,

His eyes transfigured with a sacred light.

SELF

Or I can trace the cycles that have been,
See silent priests, dead Cæsars, face to face;
Laugh with old wits, with serious statesmen
pace,
Peep unobserved at many a secret scene.

Thence through wild woods my dreaming way
I take,
Through ancient cities piled of ponderous
stones,
Or dripping caverns carpeted with bones,
To wattled huts isled in a mountain lake.

Backwards, still backwards, till the glowing earth
Lose beast and tree, and show her haggard scars;
To chaos, and the chill sun's nebulous birth:—
Above, beneath, the flaming æons roll:—
Still in its cold cell sits the brooding soul,
More to itself than thirty thousand stars.

KEATS

LAUGHING thou said'st, 'Twere hell for thee to
fail

In thy vast purpose, in thy brave design,
Ere thy young cheek, with passion's venom'd
wine

Flushed and grew pale, ah me! flushed and grew
pale!

Where is thy music now? In hearts that pine
O'erburdened, for the clamorous world too frail,
Yet love the charm'd dusk, the nightingale,
Not for her sweet sake only, but for thine.

Thy name is writ in water, ay, 'tis writ
As when the moon, a chill and friendless thing,
Passes and writes her will upon the tide,
And piles the ocean in a moving ring:
And every stagnant bay is brimmed with it,
Each mast-fringed port, each estuary wide.

VICTORY

So, I have gained a crown and lost a friend.

What, was he envious of my climbing fame,
Did he aspire to what I did not claim,
Mistake the summit that I dared ascend ?
And I, who chiefly toiled that I might spend
My hoarded hopes to crown his tardier name,
Sad and alone, in solitude and shame,
Sit mourning, careless what the fates may send.

So David, when the fiercest fight was won,
Recked not of all the faithful hearts that bled
To comfort him, to guard his troubled days :
He to his Captains spoke no word of praise,
But wailed in cold unreasoning grief, and said:
“ O my son Absalom, my son, my son.”

THE PURSUIT

I HAD outstripped him on the moorland wide,
The heathery moor, with grassy tracks between
The peaty hills : at eve he should have been
A moving speck upon the far hill-side.

But here within the tangled forest, here
With all these trailing vines about my feet,
Among the tall tree-stems, he steps as fleet
As I, though I be winged with instant fear.

For every clutching branch I rend away,
Each knotted creeper, tremblingly untied,
Each hazel thicket, where I bend and crawl,
Leaves free the perilous gap for him to glide
Still nearer, till with sobbing breath I fall
Upon my face, and he shall spring and slay.

THE GENTIAN

SAY gentian, by what daring alchemy
Dost thou distil from cold and weary stones,
From tumbled rocks, the spent earth's staring
bones,
The intensest essence of the unclouded sky ?

Is it through dreaming, night by weary night,
Through still pale months beneath the drifted
snow,
Dreaming of sunshine and warm fields aglow,
Of azure depths, vast leagues of tranquil light ?

Not thine the outrageous splendours of the morn,
The crimson pomp of sunset, the brisk ray
Of the heavenly arch, of watery conflict born,
But the pure radiance of the untroubled
heaven

When the eye dives, in headlong rapture
driven,

Zone beyond zone, and finds no stop nor stay.

THE GRASSHOPPER

REST, rest, impatient heart, thou dost not know
What 'tis thou seekest: wilt thou hurl away
For petty praise, a little gilded show,
The lavish treasure of the golden day?

Yon grasshopper, in green enamelled mail,
With waving whisks and blunted nose upthrust,
Draws whizzing thighs athwart his plated tail,
Or trails his belly in the sun-warmed dust,

Or leaps among his fellows, caring nought
Which leaps the highest, which the braver drest;
With solemn face his edged jaws crossing slow
He clips the succulent salad: gives no thought
That soon the clouds shall gather from the West,
And all the high hill-pastures ache with snow.

UTTERANCE

I HAVE strung my harp, and tuned each subtle chord
To truest consonance, and day by day
Have trained my tripping fingers how to stray
With swift unerring motions. I have stored

My mind with every grave melodious tone,
Each eager modulation, deftly planned
O'er perilous gaps to reach a welcoming hand:—
Yet cannot frame a music of my own.

O for that hour when, with reverberant wings,
Some airy thought, deliberate, at my call,
Shall drop beside me, whispering in my ear:
And I shall seize my harp, and thrill to hear
The pent-up music ripple and break, with all
My heart's rich secrets echoing down the strings.

ANNIVERSARIES

WHEN I was yet a child, my sparkling days
Spake little with each other, but with joy
Each sprang to life, by favourite friend or toy
Distinguished, walking in familiar ways ;

Each in itself a breathing mystery,
Portending nought, save through the lagging
weeks,
In restless foot, in flushed and eager cheeks,
Savour and sound of the imagined sea.

But now they talk together, and are sad ;—
“ To-day,” they say, “ how short a time ago,
We laid her, weeping, in the churchyard
ground : ”
And one saith, “ ere the solemn year move
round,
Shall this be reft from me that makes me glad ? ”
And all make answer, saying “ Even so.”

THE LONG SLEEP

As one that wakes and from his pillow leaps,
With some fierce dream, some visionary shock,
Or gusty chiding of the turret-clock,
And deems it time for labour, till he creeps
Dumb and bewildered, to the window-bars,
And sees the pale lamp on the roadway shed
Strange wafts of shifting shade, and overhead
Troop through the black night the slow-marching
stars :

Then is he glad at heart, and knows the day
Is yet far off, and trims the smouldering fire,
And with delicious tremors, doth allay
His languorous head, and dives to slumber
deep ;—
Even with such eager longing, I desire
Death, and the dumb interminable sleep.

THE MESSAGE

STRETCHED in the grass, what was it that I
dreamed ?

There, where the mossy rock its streamlet
spilled,

While the sad curlew in the rushes trilled,
And flying sails by distant headlands gleamed ;

Hot o'er the heather waved the quivering air,
Sweep after sweep the billowy moorland rolled,
As tho' some stiff green coverlet did enfold
Huge sleeping giants, sprawling prostrate there.

What was it that I dreamed ? the soaring bird
Swept wold and waste, yet saw not what I saw :
Not love, not honour, not the perfect mind !

But how to tell the secret that I heard
Sung by the stream, and whispered in the wind,
Of faith and patience, and divinest awe ?

REST

To-DAY I'll give to peace ; I will not look
Behind, before me ; I will simply be ;
Hopes and regrets shall claim no share in me ;
Here I will lie beside the limpid brook,
And turn the pages of some aimless book,
Sunk and submerged in vague felicity ;
Live, mute and still, in what I feel and see,
The dreaming guardian of the upland nook.

Well ! here's my world to-day ! cicalas spare
Sawing harsh music ; beetles big, that grope
Among the grass-stems ; merry flies astir ;
And goats with impudent face and silken hair,
That poise and tinkle on the Western slope,
Breast-deep in Alpen-rose and juniper.

THE POET

HE shall be great, and something more than great,
But human first: and nought of human known
Shall slip unnoted from his meshes, thrown
With wary hand in secret seas of fate.

So great, so human, that the song he sings
Seems but the faint effulgence of the soul,
That dived to hell, and rising, pure and whole,
Beat in the sunlit air her happy wings.

His soul shall be a valley full of trees ;
Pines for soft sound, and limes for scent and
shade,
Where birds may nest, blithe thrush and
bright-eyed wren,
Flowers for delight, and fruit for healing made,
And heart of oak, to build the homes of men,
And swim secure in thunder-throated seas.

O LACRIMARUM FONS

O HOLIEST fount of sorrow, treasured tears ;

O eager consolation of sick grief ;

That bring to burdened sadness pure relief,

Ye have no fellowship with craven fears !

True tears are sorrow's guerdon, for they prove

The worth of suffering, that the sacred dart

Hath struck, and shivered the incredulous heart,

And pierced the secret amplitude of love.

For of thy shafts, that hourly past us flame,

Some taint and mar our innocence, and some

Are bent and blunted by the stubborn mind,

Or throb and rankle in the tortured frame :

But I will pray, if Thy strong hands are
kind,

“ Let them strike home, my God, let them
strike home.”

INDOLENCE

WHAT, hath the dark surprised me as I dreamed ?

The hours were mine : I neither swooned nor
slept,

Only the slow shade o'er the dial crept,
And peace was thrice as peaceful as it seemed.

Ah me ! I have not earned the right to sleep,
Nor strung my thews for battle : I have spent
The hoarded coin that was for increase lent,
Dreamed of the harvest that I may not reap.

Waste, trivial waste ! fickle and fruitless moods,
Dear to the mind of God ! Shall nature then
Bewail the helpless debt she cannot pay ?
Petals that bloom, and fall, unseen of men :
Slow springs that drip in mountain solitudes,
Rocks that the sad sea sprinkles twice a day.

PRID. KAL. OCT.

O Asian birds, that round me in the gloom
Patter and peck unseen, or with loud stroke
Soar to the covert of some branching oak,—
To-morrow comes the destined hecatomb.

Shout once again your strident orisons,
Thanks for the dewy morning, for the food
By hands unseen at woodland corners strewed,
For water cool, that through the thicket runs.

To-morrow comes the end:—the wood astir
With patient tramping figures, and the noise
Of tree-trunks tapped, the cry of eager boys,
The startled rush, and battling as you rise
Above the copse, beyond the topmost fir,
Death, lightning death, amid the echoing
skies.

DEATH

THE soul, that dizzied with the din of death,
The roar of clamorous blood in failing ears,
Still sees the sickly swimming day, and hears
The rattling in-take of his sobbing breath:

Then cleaves the dark slow, tranquillising tide,
And swims in silent waters, careless now
If still they press his hand, and kiss his brow,
But snaps the parting strands, and wanders wide,—

Then, in one glowing instant, that atones
For woe and fear, made one with life and light,
He watches, as he hangs in wondering ease,
Poised in the dusk, the red earth with her seas
And islands, snowy poles and sunlit zones,
Thunder and heave, and leap across the night.

ENVOI

*I cannot sing as sings the nightingale
Frenzied with rapture, big with rich delight,
Till lovers lean together, passion-pale,
And chide the awestruck silence of the night.*

*I cannot sing as sings the tranquil thrush,
O'er dewy thicket and untrodden lawn,
When early gossamers veil the frosted bush,
In the chaste freshness of the sparkling dawn.*

*I cannot sing as sings the brooding dove,
At windless noon, in her high towers of green,
A song of deep content, untroubled love,
With many a meditative pause between.*

ENVOI

*I cannot sing, as sings the dauntless owl
His shout of horror at a dark dead hour :
When the hair pricks, and startled watch-dogs
howl,
And night-bells clamour in the lonely tower.

But I can sing as sings the prudent bee,
As hour by patient hour he goes and comes,
Bearing the golden dust from tree to tree,
Labours in hope, and as he labours, hums.*



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